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ABSTRACT

This paper examines alternative certification programs in terms of entrance requirements, supervision and mentoring, and post-certification professional support. A good alternative program uses rigorous screening processes to ensure the selection of qualified teacher interns; provides high-quality preservice training in methodology, classroom management, and human development; has a structured, well-supervised induction period that includes guidance by a mentor teacher; requires ongoing professional development; and follows up with post-internship training to ensure continued effective teaching. Two alternative programs are described: the Texas Alternative Certification Program, the largest school-based teacher education effort, and Teach for America, a non-university private group that has developed its own concept of teacher education. The two programs appear to have the same basic components: similar entrance requirements, pre-assignment training, some university coursework, and collaborative support and mentoring from participating entities. However, the first program is teacher-centered, with the emphasis on methodology, theory, and pedagogy, while the second is more learner-centered and problem-driven. The study concludes that alternative certification programs may be enhanced through collaboration among alternative programs, university faculty and programs, school districts, and other related parties. (Contains 15 references.) (ND)

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# Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Certification Programs:

## Strategies for Enhancement, Improvement, and Peaceful Co-existence with Traditional Teacher Certification Programs

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Post-baccalaureate teacher certification programs (the term most commonly associated with university-based alternative certification programs) and other types of alternative certification programs became prominent in the mid to late 1980's as a mechanism to address the severe teacher shortage that existed in the academic areas of math and science, as well as in urban and rural geographic areas. In addition to filling the need for certified teachers in specific areas, Fenstermacher (1990) lists other possibilities for the acceptance of alternative certification. He believes that alternative certification:

1. Provides opportunities for bright college graduates to begin careers in teaching without having to complete extended teacher education programs;
2. Provides relief in times of a teacher shortage while also resolving the problems of competent performance engendered

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by emergency credentials;

3. Breaks the lock that teacher education programs appears to have on entry into the teaching profession;
4. Provides political capital for politicians and policymakers who want to be identified with the school reform movement;
5. Offers a means for other actors, such as foundations and corporations, to become players in the formation of teaching policy; and
6. Increases the range of choices or alternatives available for career entry, consistent with the emerging, more pervasive political ideology favoring choice and deregulation.

Through this discussion, alternative certification programs will be defined and discussed in terms of entrance requirements, length of programs, supervision and mentoring, and post-certification professional support. Strategies for improvement of alternative certification programs will be provided in the following areas:

1. Identification and building of existing alternative programmatic strengths and opportunities afforded interns to incorporate their learning experiences into their professional development; and
2. Cooperation and collaboration between alternative certification programs and traditional teacher education programs.

**Definitions, Distinctions, and Descriptions**

Post-baccalaureate teacher certification programs certify individual to teach through alternative routes, which vary accordingly. Some certification programs are operated by private groups and organizations, and others include those that are university-based, non-university based, and school-based. The definitions and descriptions of these various of

certifying programs also vary. According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), alternative certification may be defined as

> "any significant departure from the traditional undergraduate route through teacher education programs in colleges and universities" (Smith, 1985, p. 24)

Roth (1994) defines alternative certification as certification requirements that permit demonstrated competence in appropriate subject areas gained in careers outside of education to be substituted for traditional teacher training coursework. With alternative certification programs, the "alternative" part of such a program is that it gives people who already hold a college degree the opportunity to earn a teaching certificate more quickly than going through the full teacher education program. Alternative programs are geared toward mature adults, rather than college students, and vary significantly from traditional teacher education programs. Making a very basic distinction between traditional teacher certification and alternative certification, Fenstermacher (1990) asserts that the first (traditional teacher certification) requires extensive study prior to taking responsibility for a classroom, and is generally under the umbrella of a teacher education institution. The second, he states, places individuals in a classroom rather quickly, with some study and supervision, though this varies from district to district or state to state.

As stated earlier, alternative certification programs vary according to type, structure, and base of organization. Due to these differences, individuals should refrain from making sweeping generalization about the alternative programs as a whole. Roth (1994) cautions that generalizations about "alternative" programs are difficult because of the wide range of programs encompassed by the word "alternative". Some alternative programs actually provide for full preparation for certification, but through an alternative path such as flexible scheduling. Many require only limited preparation, particularly prior to assignment to a classroom. These are more appropriately referred to as alternative, since they provide an alternative set of requirements for certification, not just different means of getting there.

Similar to that of traditional certification programs, alternative programs have state standards and guidelines that vary according to their location. The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification manual (NASDTEC, 1991) describes state standards, programs, and alternative routes to certification. The authors broadly define the term "alternative certification" and report that 34 states have 42 alternative certification avenues. Agencies administering these include combinations of the state, school districts, and colleges. Three avenues are administered solely by school districts five by school districts and the state, four by school districts and colleges, and four by school districts, colleges, and the state. A total of 11,576 candidates completed alternative avenues certification between 1988 and 1990 (NASDTEC, 1991, Q-13).

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education indicates that, in 1990, 48 states reported alternative-route programs for teachers leading to either permanent certification or temporary certification (AACTE, 1990). The National Center for Education Information (Feistritzer & Chester, 1992; Feistritzer, 1992) identifies 40 states implementing alternatives to the approved college teacher education program route for certifying teachers. From 1985 to 1990, approximately 20,000 candidates were certified through alternative routes. By 1992, the number had increased to about 40,000, almost doubling in two years (Feistritzer, 1992, p. 6).

Taking into consideration the variations that exist within alternative certification programs, a typical alternative program does the following things:

1. Uses a rigorous screening process to ensure the selection of talented, qualified teacher interns who are academically and personally competent;
2. Provides high-quality preservice training in methodology, classroom management, and human development;
3. Consists of a structured, well-supervised induction period that includes guidance by a mentor teacher for the period

of one year;

4. Requires ongoing professional development, including seminars, workshops, and university course work that addresses the specific needs of the teacher-intern; and
5. Follows up with post-internship training to ensure continued effective training (Littleton & Holcomb, 1994).

Colleges of education typically provide primary oversight of the programs, which are considered "field based" because they generally require a yearlong internship in the school district. That means both the school district and the university have a hand in molding the teacher intern, sharing in the professional development of the emerging teacher. This shared responsibility of the teacher-intern's professional development is accomplished through teacher induction plans. Teacher induction plans, which provide on-the-job training, are designed to help new teachers through their usually tough new year in the classroom. The university provides the preservice training, and the school district assists with the ongoing training under the guidance of a mentor teacher. The mentor, who is an experienced and fully certified teacher, serves as a guide, counselor, protector, and friend to the new teacher (Littleton & Holcomb, 1994).

With regards to the initiation of new teacher induction programs, two major categories comprise the content of these programs. One deals with the emotional trauma and addresses issues such as stress and burnout (Gold & Roth, 1993). The second provides training in the basic aspects of instruction: classroom management, discipline, lesson planning, and curriculum (Roth, 1994).

**A Study in Contrasts: Texas Alternative Certification Program and Teach for America**

The largest school-based teacher education effort is in Texas. The Houston Independent School District implemented the first Texas Alternative Certification Program (ACP) during the 1985-86 school year during which it prepared and certified 276 teachers. By 1989-90, 13 alternative programs had been implemented in Texas. The Board of Education revised the alternative certification rule by removing the restriction that programs be based on data verifying teacher shortages. The Texas Alternative Certification Program contains three models: the higher education model with university coursework as the nucleus of training, the education service center (ESC) model, with limited higher education supervision; and the local district model (the original model), with a minimum amount of higher education coursework. Programs emphasize preparation for the urban classroom and work with at-risk students (Roth, 1994).

This teacher preparation program has the following features:

1. A design generated from the ground up by a broad-based coalition of educators - teachers (including former interns), principals, professors, regional service center specialists, and others;
2. Pre-assignment training in the components deemed indispensable for entry into the classroom;
3. A yearlong internship with a master teacher/mentor that includes inservice training and university coursework;
4. Multiple layers of supervision and; consequently, exposure to a variety of points of view about the teaching/learning process; and
5. A cohort group of interns who share the challenges and successes of first-year teaching and beyond (Dill, 1990).

Candidates for these programs must have a baccalaureate degree and pass a standardized test ensuring basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills. Pre-assignment training occurs at night or in the summer, followed by placement as the official teacher of

record in a classroom. The intern is supervised and mentored during the course of the full-year program. After a year of this internship, the new teacher must take a standardized exit or certification (ExCET) test and, if in all areas, receives the joint recommendation of the program director and the principal for state certification (Roth, 1994).

Teach for America is a non-university, private group which began in 1989 as a effort to recruit and select individuals to teach in urban and rural public schools, the areas where the teacher shortage was the most pronounced. At the onset, this organization began to train their corps members in what they considered to be a fairly traditional way. The recruits attended a series of courses and classes during a preservice summer training institute; once they began teaching, they enrolled in local schools of education to take certification courses. However, according to Wendy Kopp (1994), the group's founder and president, this approach turned out to be a frustrating one. Courses were too often disconnected from the realities of corps members' classrooms, and corps members received inadequate support and professional development after they began teaching, when they needed it most.

After their first three years, the organization began to develop their own concept of teacher education, and strong views about teacher professional development. The first was a belief that beginning teachers should assume responsibility for shaping their professional development experience. The belief stemmed from three observations:

1. Individuals learn most when empowered to exercise personal initiative and creativity;
2. The only way to ensure that professional development is relevant to classroom experience is to charge the teacher with the responsibility of shaping the professional development program; and
3. As long as teacher education treat beginning teachers as passive recipients of knowledge, alternative programs will be guilty

of further socializing them into the factory-model approach to education that school reformers are working so hard to change.

A second conviction was that individuals need experience with full control over their classrooms before they can become excellent teachers. Corps members are best qualified to understand the value of professional development-and are most needy of support and guidance-after they have assumed responsibility in their classrooms (Kopp, 1994).

Based on those early experiences and the group's newly developed views and beliefs about teacher education and teacher preparation, they designed a two-year "Professional Teacher Residency Program". During this time, the corps members would assume full teaching responsibility while engaged in a learner-driven professional development. What this meant for the participants was that they were given the responsibility of managing their own professional development in defined outcome areas. This development centered around their experiences. During practice teaching within the preservice program, the corps members identified challenges that they face in the classroom and weaknesses in the outcome areas. Projects were developed in order to overcome these identified challenged. As a means of assisting, an extensive support structure of guidance, resources, and opportunities for collaboration were provided to the participants. Kopp (1994) asserts that individuals should receive professional licenses to teach, not when they have taken certain numbers of credit hours, but when their teaching performance consistently demonstrated standards of excellence. During the two-year internship corps members are evaluated at the end of each year and required to submit portfolios, self-evaluations, teacher work, and other documents to a review panel. Based on these documents and other information, the panel decides whether of not the participant is ready to exit the program.

The two alternative programs appear to have the same basic components: similar entrance requirements, pre-assignment training, some university coursework, and collaborative support and mentoring from participating entities. The difference lies in the

philosophies: the first appears to be teacher-centered, with the emphasis on methodology, theory, and pedagogy; where the second program is more learner-centered and problem-driven. Having a strong knowledge base not only ensures success in passing the exit examination for certification, but affords interns the necessary background to address the academic needs of their students. This is a major strength of the Texas Alternative Certification Program. Knowledge of the pedagogy, methodology, and theory provides the foundation upon with effective strategies, practices, and management techniques can be built.

Conversely, with Teach for America, having the teacher-interns develop projects based on identified challenged follows the constructivist view of learning. In this approach, learners do not passively receive knowledge. Rather, they "construct" it, building on the base of prior knowledge, attitudes, and values. The learner creates patterns, rules, and strategies through hands-on experimentation (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This approach also requires the interns to bear some responsibility for their learning experience, which ensures some level of ownership in the process of their development. This may, in turn, impact their teaching styles. If they can be taught to become responsible for their learning and development as educators, then they may, in turn, require their own students to take some responsibility for their learning experiences. Requiring teacher-interns to responsibility for their learning and shifting the teacher training process from being instruction-centered (passive) to learner-centered (active) may enhance both the effectiveness of the training and the effectiveness of the interns once their step into their own classrooms.

The strengths outlined from the above mentioned programs can serve to enhance teacher preparation and effectiveness in alternative programs. Programmatic comparisons among alternative programs and between alternative programs and traditional programs also offer program directors an opportunity to observe and evaluate effective strategies that may be applicable for their programs. The one strategy that appears to stand out in the literature for enhancing alternative programs is creating collaboration between the

alternative programs, university faculty and programs, schools districts, and other related parties. In a call for collaboration, Roth (1995) suggests that we:

> "...use each other's strengths. The privately funded groups could step up their already successful recruiting efforts and create a supply for schools, colleges, and departments of education. Local communities and schools could assist. Colleges and universities, in collaboration with local schools, already provide an excellent preparation for entry to the profession. Working together, they could provide new teachers with support and assistance. I truly believe this is the most beneficial combination, offers the best teaching environment for children, and would enhance the stature of the profession" (p. 264).

Kopp (1994) appeals to university schools of education to participate in collaborative efforts, asserting that they cannot develop truly effective programs without working collaboratively with school systems, recognizing and acting on their responsibility to recruit, select, and develop effective teachers. University programs must look beyond their walls and forge alliances with other professions and service agencies to develop education professionals who capitalize on community resources and institutions (Roth, 1995). It appears that a shared vision among collaborating partners serves to better meet the needs of all, especially in the area of teacher training and preparation.

## Conclusion

Regardless of the type alternative certification program, their primary goal is to provide competent, professionally trained teachers for America's schools. Enhancing programmatic effectiveness can be done in a number of ways, but appears to be best accomplished in cooperation with all individuals and parties involved with the certification process. As Kopp (1994) so apt put it, ..."we must work together to determine how we can realize the day when our nation's most talented individuals compete to enter the profession of teaching, and when only those whose teaching performance consistently

meets standards of excellence are granted professional licenses to work alongside our nation's children" (p. 187).

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